

SILENCE AND WORSHIP:
A STUDY IN QUAKER EXPERIENCE

BY THE SAME AUTHOR
THE RISE OF THE QUAKERS
A WAYFARER'S FAITH
THE LONG PILGRIMAGE

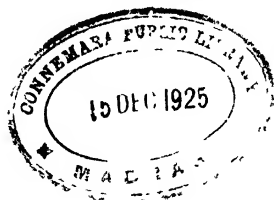
SILENCE AND WORSHIP

A STUDY IN QUAKER EXPERIENCE

BY

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REFER.



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REFER

INTRODUCTORY

THIS essay touches but the fringe of a great subject. It was prepared for discussion in a group of men representing very different schools of thought and belonging to various religious denominations, some of whom desired to see it printed.

It should be noted that the subject has been limited to the consideration of silence in collective or congregational worship, and its place in individual worship is only dealt with in its relation to the worship of a group. Some of the ground covered by this study has been traversed previously by Violet Hodgkin (Mrs. John Holdsworth) in her Swarthmore Lecture on Silent Worship, which deals also with other aspects of the theme, in a way which has made many beside the present writer her debtors.

A further limitation is implicit in the historic background of the religious fellowship whose mode of worship is here described. The Quaker experiment was not made on the untilled soil of the forest, but

on ground prepared by centuries of Jewish and Christian experience. The worship here described is coloured by the outcome of that experience and cannot be wholly separated from it. This path of prayer then is a part of the Christian way, and those who trod it have tried to be disciples. They sought to follow one Master, as Himself the way, the truth and the life



Silence and Worship:

A Study in Quaker Experience

FROM very early times and amongst many different faiths silence has taken a place, and sometimes an important place, in worship, more especially when the worshippers took part in an act of communion with the Divine object of worship. Periods of silent prayer form in practice a very important part of the worship of countless Christians, and it would seem that collective silent prayer is being increasingly used for short periods in many places of worship as an addition to the ordinary liturgy. But probably no Christian community shares the position of the Society of Friends, which for some eight or nine generations in the British Isles and several of the Eastern States of America has made silence the basis of all its acts of collective worship, although it is true that numbers of Friends in other parts of America have in recent years ceased to take this position.

How did the early Quakers come to adopt the practice of silent worship, which so soon became universal, as the background, at least, of their meetings?

In the strange confusion of sects and religious

controversies which prevailed during the Civil Wars and the early years of the Commonwealth, groups of men and women, known as Seekers, separated themselves from the organized worship of the Churches, and were in the practice of meeting together and waiting in silent prayer. Recent research has shown that it was especially amongst such groups of Seekers that the early Quaker preachers found their converts. In 1652, in particular, when the Quaker movement took more definite shape, George Fox found in the large group of Seekers in southern Westmorland and north-west Yorkshire hundreds of eager disciples, the Seeker preachers, Thomas Taylor, John Camm, Francis Howgill and John Audland, becoming almost at once prominent leaders of Quakerism. Thus from the earliest years of the Society of Friends many of its members had already been accustomed to meet in devotional silence, and were not adopting a new practice, but continuing and developing one to which they were used.

The silent worship of the early Quakers was, however, different in character from that of the Seekers which preceded it, as an examination of contemporary evidence will make clear. The Seekers were not, strictly speaking, an organized sect, although sometimes so treated by writers of the time. The movement of which they form a part may be connected with that little-known sixteenth-century reformer, Caspar Schwenkfeld (1489-1561), Silesian nobleman and scholar, who in his wanderings and persecutions encouraged little groups of disciples to meet quietly together, withdrawing from the sacraments and worship both of

the Catholic and Protestant Churches, with the view that in the general apostasy from the true life of Christianity it was the duty of faithful disciples to await a fresh unfolding of Divine grace.

Such communities of "stille Frommen" continued in Germany until the eighteenth century, and a few of their descendants are to be found in America to-day. Their teaching probably influenced groups of Dutch Mennonites, who withdrew in like manner to hold private gatherings of their members without regular preachers, for mutual edification, the reading and discussion of the Scriptures, and periods of waiting in prayer, followed sometimes by prophetic preaching.*

Perhaps the earliest English "Seeker" was Bartholomew Legate, a cloth merchant, who, during

* The sect of Familists, or the Family of Love, identified with the Seekers by William Penn in the (on the whole) friendly reference to them in his preface to Fox's "Journal," seem to have been really a distinct body or group of bodies, following the teaching of Henry Nicholas. According to the not unprejudiced Ephraim Pagitt, they were, however, prepared to conform outwardly to other religions. Nicholas himself resembled George Fox in many points of his teaching and urged silent worship on his followers. "Grow up in stillness and singleness of heart," he says, urging his family to "break spiritual bread together in stillness, abiding steadfast in prayer, till all covering, wherewith their hearts after the flesh are covered, is done away, that is to say, until the spiritual, heavenly and uncovered being of Christ appears and comes to their spirit." Introduction to "Glass of Righteousness," quoted by Rufus M. Jones, "Studies in Mystical Religion," p. 438.

William C. Braithwaite has pointed out in the case of Thomas Barcroft, of Colne, an instance of one who had been a Grindletonian Familist and later became a Quaker looking back with gratitude to his earlier teachers as having led him in the right direction ("The Beginnings of Quakerism," p. 24).

business visits to Holland, came into touch with Mennonites of the Seeker type and became a preacher amongst them. In 1608 he had the honour to be the last English heretic burned at the stake at Smithfield.

Throughout the next generation groups of Seekers became more numerous in England, though our chief knowledge of them is from the attacks of opponents. An exception is the book of John Jackson, published anonymously under the title "A Sober Word to a Serious People, or a Moderate Discourse respecting as well the Seekers (so called) as the present Churches" We learn from his preface that numbers shared for a time with these Seekers in withdrawing from the worship of the organized Churches under a sense of its insufficiency and then, failing to find adequate spiritual food in the waiting meetings of the Seekers, returned for help to their former pastors. Some, he says, "finding them (the Seekers) inconsiderable both for quantity and quality, and nothing extant which in any measure might be a stay to them, by laying a ground for their dependence and further waiting upon God, have waxed weary and almost fainted in their minds, and at best have returned to that condition from whence at first they brought themselves, happy they were escaped, using such expressions as these 'Come, let us go back to Egypt for bread it's better take it at the mouth of ravens than starve' "

Jackson's book is itself in large measure negative, arguing that all the existing Churches alike lack Divine or apostolic authority. At the close he briefly advocates that the "mourners of Sion"

should have friendly Christian communication with one another, diligently searching the scriptures and awaiting the possibility of a fresh immediate revelation from above. His last words are these : " Now the Lord direct our hearts into the Love of God, and into a patient waiting for Christ, for as much as unto them that look for Him shall He appear the second time without sin unto salvation therefore in patience let us possess our souls, knowing that the time is coming, yea hastening, when the blind shall see, the lame shall leap, and the stammering tongue be unloosed In the meantime, LET BROTHERLY LOVE CONTINUE."

It is interesting to note that Jackson did not join the Quakers, but engaged in printed controversy with James Naylor, though it was a controversy less bitter than most of that day

The Quaker apothecary and preacher, Charles Marshall, was as a youth a member of a group of Seekers at Bristol, which he briefly describes in his journal. " And in those times, which was about the year 1654, there were many which were seeking after the Lord, and there were a few of us that kept one day of the week in fasting and prayer ; so that when this day came, we met together early in the morning, not tasting anything ; and sat down sometimes in silence, and as any found a concern on their spirits and inclination in their hearts, they kneeled down and sought the Lord ; so that sometimes before the day ended, there might be twenty of us might pray, men and women, and sometimes children, spake a few words in prayer ; and we were sometimes greatly bowed and broken down before the Lord, in humility and tenderness. And unto

one of these our meetings, in the year 1654, came dearly beloved John Audland and John Camm, messengers of the everlasting God. . . .” *

Several friendly references to groups of Seekers and their relation to the first Quaker gatherings are to be found in the collection of material on the origin of the Quaker movement collected by the Society in the later part of the seventeenth century †

The meetings of the Seekers probably varied greatly in different places and in accordance with the spiritual development to which different groups had attained, but it may be said that their very name denotes the weak point of their communion. They were still seeking, they were not yet finders. They met in a sense of the inadequacy of other worship, not because they had found a worship which satisfied their need

* Charles Marshall, “Sion’s Travellers Comforted,” 1704

† Thus we read that in 1652 at Mobberley, in Cheshire, there were “a people who sometimes met at the house of one Rich Yarwood whose custom was when met together neither to preach nor pray vocally, but to read the Scriptures and discourse of religion, expecting a further manifestation” (“First Publishers of Truth,” p 18)

“There were several people in Wigton aforesaid, and thereabouts in Cumberland, that had separated themselves from the national worship and met together by themselves to seek the Lord, if possibly they might feel after Him” (p 54)

And again at Ross in Herefordshire, the first Quaker messengers met with many people, “who had some time before separated themselves from the public worship of the world, . . . who did often before meet together by themselves, and would many times sit in silence and no particular person appointed to speak or preach amongst them, but each of them did speak by way of exhortation as had freedom, so that the Lord’s power was mightily at work in their hearts and great openings there was amongst them” (p 124).

This is put very clearly from the Quaker standpoint by George Keith in 1670, in his little tractate on "The Benefit, Advantage and Glory of silent Meetings," in which he writes "Before the breaking forth of this clear manifestation of faith that now shineth in great brightness and glory, which began in the nation of England some twenty-six years ago, or so, there was many people, both in that nation and elsewhere, in whom there was true desires and breathings raised and begot after the Lord . . . and about the same time, the people, even these of them . . . who were most tender, ingenuous and zealous (through a weakness of understanding, and because of the customary way they had been used to), had too much an eye to words and too much a life in them, for they could not meet, but some behoved to speak, in doctrine, exhortation, or prayer, etc, otherwise they would have thought the time misspent, so much as passed away of it without words" *

Keith goes on to describe the very different nature of the silent meetings among Quakers, in which the worshippers entered into the life which is beyond words and silence might continue for hours to the spiritual help of the worshippers.

The writings of Edward Burrough, who was one of the most prominent of the first group of Quaker preachers, contain many references to his earnest efforts to guide his readers to a true understanding of the implications of this silent worship and the dangers of hasty utterance.

Thus, writing to Friends in London in 1655, he

* Op. cit., p. 3.

says. "Dear Friends, great is our care on every side, and we are jealous over you lest ye depart from the simplicity of the Gospel . . . therefore all in silence wait, be swift to hear, slow to speak, and all wait upon the Light in diligence . . . take heed of forward wills in speaking, lest your minds be drawn out from the movings of the Pure within to hearken to words without . . . And therefore now as the Power ariseth within you, dwell low in it, and sink down in the same, and as things open in you, speak not forth but as things open, treasure them in your hearts. *

And again in another letter "Wait in silence, and wait to have salt and savour in yourselves, to know the voice of Christ from the voice of the Stranger, for till that be known in yourselves you are not able to judge " †

While in a third letter he adds "And all be still, and cool, and quiet, and of a meek spirit, that out of boisterousness and eagerness and feignedness, and self-love you may be preserved in your measures up to God, and if any be moved to speak a few words in your meetings, this we charge you all, that you speak nothing but that which is given in ; and in the sense, and in the cross ; and do not add your own words, for then you will burden others who dwell in the life. . . ." ‡

This advice to those beginning to speak in the ministry is characteristic of the early Quakers' standpoint. The minister is to feel that the words he speaks are given him as a message ; he must

* Works, p 71

† Ibid., p 76

‡ Edward Burrough's Works, p. 74

have, as he speaks, the continuous sense of this, and of dependence on the Divine spirit whose guidance he has to seek; and his attitude of mind must be one of humility, in undertaking a burden painful to be borne without the presence of the support thus given

Two years later George Fox wrote an Epistle on the same topic, which, though involved in form and not without some repetition of thought, contains passages characteristic of the man and illuminating in their exposition of the way of worship which he advocates

"Come out of your bustlings, you that are bustling and in strife one against another, whose spirits are not quieted, but are fighting with words . . ."

"Keep to that of God in you, which will lead you up to God, when you are still from your own thoughts and imaginations, and desires and counsels of your own hearts, and motions and will, when you stand single from all these, waiting upon the Lord, your strength is renewed, he that waits upon the Lord, feels his shepherd and he shall not want: and that which is of God in every one is that which brings them together to wait upon God, which brings them to unity, which joins their hearts together up to God. So as this moves, this is not to be quenched, when it moves to pray or speak. . . .

"And all you that are in your own wisdom, and in your own reason . . . it is a strange life to you to come to. be silent, you must come into a new

* "An Epistle to all people on the earth (who are to be silent and who to speak)." "Doctrinals," pp 91-106.

world. Now thou must die in the silence to the fleshly wisdom, knowledge, reason and understanding, so thou comest to feel that which brings thee to wait upon God (thou must die to the other), that brings thee to feel the power of an endless life, and come to possess it "

This was followed by another brief message,* in which Fox writes " Concerning the silent meetings, the intent of all speaking is to bring unto the life and to walk in and to possess the same, and to live in and to enjoy it, and to feel God's presence, and that is in the silence (not in the wandring, whirling, tempestuous part of man or woman), for there is the flock lying down at noon-day and feeding of the bread of life and drinking at the spring of life, when they do not speak words, for words declared are to bring people to it, and confessing God's goodness and love as they are moved by the Eternal God and His Spirit, and so all ravenous spirits that are from the witness of God in themselves cannot be still, cannot be silent, it is a burden to them . . . so are gone from the silence and stillness and from waiting upon God to have their strength renewed, and so are dropt into the sects among one another, and so have the words of Christ and the Apostles, but inwardly are ravened from the still life, in which the fellowship is attained to in the Spirit of God, in the power of God, which is the Gospel, in which is the Fellowship, when there are no words spoken."

It is evident from this passage that at this early date some who had joined for a short time the

* " Doctrinals," p 103

Quaker meetings had fallen away dissatisfied with their basis of silence, and hostile critics must have been many

Thus in 1663, in Cornwall, Fox's "Journal" records —

"Ye priests and professors of all sorts was much against Friends' silent meetings, and sometimes ye priests and professors would come to our meetings and when they saw 100 or 200 of people all silent waiteinge upon ye Lord they would breake out into a wondringe and despiseinge and some of y^m woulde say looke how these people setts mumminge and dumminge What edification is heere where there is noe words Come, woulde they say, lett us bee gonne, what should wee stay heere to see a people sett of this manner and they sayde they never saw ye like in there lifes" *

Not a few of the early Friends, however, as well as many at later times up to our own day, found in the silent meeting for worship a turning-point in their lives Thus, for instance, John Grave of Isell, in Cumberland, became a Quaker in 1654, "being invyted by a fr^d. to a sylent meet, in w God's heavenly power broke in upon him, whereby he was wonderfully shaken, insoemuch y^t he was constrain'd to cry out agst the many gods in Egypt" †

Compare the experience of the Welsh Quaker, Richard Davies, at his first Quaker meeting —

"When the First-day of the week came, we went to a meeting at W. Pane's at the Wild-Cop (at Shrewsbury), where we had a silent meeting, and

* "Cambridge Journal," Vol. II, p 28

† "First Publishers of Truth," p 43

tho' it was silent from words, yet the word of the Lord God was among us, it was as a hammer and a fire, it was sharper than any two-edged sword, it pierced through our inward parts, it melted and brought us into tears, that there was scarcely a dry eye among us; the Lord's blessed power overshadowed our meeting, and I could have said that God alone was Master of that assembly." *

The way in which meetings for silent worship were started amongst the new converts to Quakerism is well pictured by another Cumberland Quaker, Christopher Story

"After several meetings amongst us, and divers convinced, we were advised to keep a meeting to wait upon the Lord, tho' there were none to speak words so we agreed to have a meeting at my house in the year 1672 being but a few, we concluded to have it in an upper room of mine; and when we sat down together, I may say I was hard beset to keep my mind from running hither and thither after the transitory things of this world, and a great warfare I had for the greatest part of the meeting Yet near the conclusion, those vain thoughts vanished, and the Lord was pleased to bring into my remembrance how that men who had great possessions in this world had their day and were gone, and in a little time I saw clearly my day would soon run over; and I was wonderfully comforted in my spirit, and my inward man renewed in a sense of the Lord's nearness; and being on this wise encouraged, we kept to our silent meetings and report went abroad that we had

* "An account of the convincement, exercises, services, and travels of . . . Richard Davies," 1765 ed., p. 40.

settled a meeting, and several came and sat down among us, and when there was a Publick Friend we mostly had the meeting without doors, but when only ourselves, in that upper room" *

This is typical of what took place all over the country as the Quaker movement spread †

Perhaps the most striking instance of the way in which these silent meetings might be the means by which a profound spiritual change might come is the well-known passage in the "Apology," in which Robert Barclay describes his own conversion to Quakerism

"For not a few have come to be convinced of the truth after this manner, of which I myself, in

* "A brief account of the life of that faithful elder and minister of Christ Jesus, Christopher Story," 1726, pp 20, 21

† Thus Robert Hawkin of Liskeard, in Cornwall, after speaking of the visits of the first Quaker preachers, continues

"Soon after this we were pretty many gather'd in this place to sit down in silence and waite upon y^e Lord, and we had many good and comfortable seasons and meetings att this time, where we felt y^e alone Teacher nigh us administring to our spiritual wants, by whome we were enabled both to wait and to suffer for His blessed truth and Name sake" ("First Publishers of Truth," p 22)

Similarly, in Bedfordshire, we learn that when the first Quaker messengers brought their message in 1654, some of the new converts "soon after convinced met together att Dunstable and Sewell, when but five or six in number, to wait upon God in silence, and ye Lord bled us with His presence, and gave us ye spiritt of discerning, that in measure the ear tasted words, as ye pallett meat And when itt pleasd y^e Lord to call our dear and well-beloved Jno Crook into the minestry, He gave him ye word of wisdom to speak to every state, by which many were convinced and others confirmd in ye bled truth" ("First Publishers of Truth," pp. 6, 7)

part, am a true witness, who not by strength of arguments, or by a particular disquisition of each doctrine, and convincement of my understanding thereby, came to receive and bear witness of the truth, but by being secretly reached by this life ; for when I came into the silent assemblies of God's people, I felt a secret power among them, which touched my heart, and as I gave way unto it, I found the Evil weakening in me and the Good raised up, and so I became thus knit and united unto them, hungering more and more after the increase of this power and life, whereby I might feel myself perfectly redeemed " *

The chapter on worship in which this passage occurs is the completest exposition of the practice and belief of the early Quakers with regard to their method of worship, and has exercised a great influence on Quaker thought in succeeding centuries. It is worth while to cite a few of the more noteworthy passages

" When assembled, the great work of one and all ought to be to wait upon God , and returning out of their own thoughts and imaginations, to feel the Lord's presence, and know a gathering into his name indeed, where he is in the midst, according to his promise. And as every one is thus gathered, and so met inwardly in their spirits, as well as outwardly in their persons, there the secret power and virtue of life is known to refresh the soul, and the pure motions and breathings of God's spirit are felt to arise , from which, as words of declaration, prayers, or praises arise, the acceptable worship is

* Barclay's " Apology," Proposition XI, 8th ed., p 308.

known which edifies the Church and is well-pleasing to God. And no man here limits the Spirit of God, nor bringeth forth his own conned and gathered stuff, but every one puts that forth which the Lord puts into their hearts and it is uttered forth not in man's will and wisdom, but in the evidence and demonstration of the Spirit, and of power. Yea, though there be not a word spoken, yet is the true spiritual worship performed, and the body of Christ edified, yea, it may, and hath often fallen out among us, that divers meetings have past without one word, and yet our souls have been greatly edified and refreshed, and our hearts wonderfully overcome with the secret sense of God's power and spirit, which without words have been ministered from one vessel to another. This is indeed strange and incredible to the mere natural and carnally-minded man, who will be apt to judge all time lost where there is not something spoken that is obvious to the outward senses "

" From this principle of man's being silent and not acting in the things of God of himself, until thus actuated by God's light and grace in the heart, did naturally spring that manner of sitting silent together, and waiting together upon the Lord For many thus principled, meeting together in the pure fear of the Lord, did not apply themselves presently to speak, pray or sing, etc, being afraid to be found acting forwardly in their own wills, but each made it their work to retire inwardly to the measure of grace in themselves, not being only silent as to words, but even abstaining from all their own thoughts, imaginations and desires, so watching in a holy dependence upon the Lord, and meeting

together not only outwardly in one place, but thus inwardly in one Spirit, and in one name of Jesus, which in His power and virtue, they come thereby to enjoy and feel the arisings of this life, which as it prevails in each particular, becomes as a flood of refreshment, and overspreads the whole meeting for man, and man's part and wisdom being denied and chained down in every individual, and God exalted, and His Grace in dominion in the heart, thus His name comes to be one in all, and His glory breaks forth, and covers all, and there is such a holy awe and reverence upon every soul, that if the natural part should arise in any, or the wise part, or what is not one with the life, it would presently be chained down, and judged out. And when any are, through the breaking forth of this power, constrained to utter a sentence of exhortation or praise, or to breathe to the Lord in prayer, then all are sensible of it, for the same life in them answers to it, as in water face answereth to face."

Not only in this passage, but again and again elsewhere, does Barclay make appeal to the test of experience —

"And there being many joined together in the same work, there is an inward travail and wrestling, and also, as the measure of grace is abode in, an overcoming of the power and spirit of darkness; and thus we are often greatly strengthened and renewed in the spirits of our minds without a word, and we enjoy and possess the holy fellowship and communion of the body and blood of Christ, by which our inward man is nourished and fed, which makes us not to dote upon outward water, and bread and wine, in our spiritual things. Now as

many thus gathered together grow up in the strength power and virtue of truth, and as truth comes thus to have victory and dominion in their souls, then they receive an utterance, and speak steadily to the edification of their brethren, and the pure life hath a free passage through them, and what is thus spoken edifieth the body indeed. Such is the evident certainty of that Divine strength that is communicated by thus meeting together, and waiting in silence upon God, that sometimes when one hath come in that hath been unwatchful and wandering in his mind, or suddenly out of the hurry of outward business, and so not inwardly gathered with the rest, so soon as he retires himself inwardly, this power being in a good measure raised in the whole meeting, will suddenly lay hold upon his spirit, and wonderfully help to raise up the good in him, and beget him into the sense of the same power, to the melting and warming of his heart, even as the warmth would take hold upon a man that is cold coming in to a stove, or as a flame will lay hold upon some little combustible matter being near unto it. Yea, if it fall out that several met together be straying in their minds, though outwardly silent, and so wandering from the measure of grace in themselves (which through the working of the enemy, and negligence of some, may fall out), if either one come in, or may be in, who is watchful, and in whom the Life is raised in a great measure, as that one keeps his place, he will feel a secret travail for the rest in a sympathy with the seed which is oppressed in the other, and kept from arising by their thoughts and wanderings; and as such a faithful one waits in the light, and keeps

in this divine work, God oftentimes answers the secret travail and breathings of His own seed through such a one, so that the rest will find themselves secretly smitten without words, and that one will be as a midwife through the secret travails of his soul to bring forth the life in them, just as a little water thrown into a pump brings up the rest, whereby life will come to be raised in all, and the vain imaginations brought down, and such a one is felt by the rest to minister life unto them without words "

This metaphor of Barclay's of the travail of soul which one may go through for another touches on a thought which was afterwards developed by Madame Guyon in a remarkable way

Sometimes the "inward travail" of such meetings was accompanied, as Barclay notes, by physical effects, which might be compared perhaps with the experience of prayer meetings or consecration meetings in a religious "revival" in our own day "Sometimes," he writes, "the power of God will break forth into a whole meeting, and there will be such an inward travail, while each is seeking to overcome the evil in themselves, that by the strong contrary workings of these opposite powers, like the going of two contrary tides, every individual will be strongly exercised as in a day of battle, and thereby trembling and a motion of the body will be upon most, if not upon all, which, as the power of truth prevails, will from pangs and groans end with a sweet sound of thanksgiving and praise. And from this the name of Quakers, i.e. Tremblers, was first reproachfully cast upon us."

Singing, indeed, was not entirely unknown in the

early Quaker meetings, as shown by Barclay's statement —

"As to the singing of psalms . . . we confess this to be a part of God's worship, and very sweet and refreshing, when it proceeds from a true sense of God's love in the heart, and arises from the divine influence of the Spirit, which leads souls to breathe forth either a sweet harmony, or words suitable to the present condition whether they be words formerly used by the saints and recorded in scripture, such as the Psalms of David, or other words, as were the hymns and songs of Zacharias, Simeon, and the blessed Virgin Mary" (Though he goes on to point out that by the formal use of such singing "oftentimes great and horrid lies are said in the sight of God")

Other writers might also be cited to show that spontaneous singing sometimes occurred in the meetings of the early Quakers, though they shared the objection of other Puritans to instrumental music *

In a later paragraph Barclay points out that the silence of Quaker worship is no end in itself "For as our worship consisteth not in words, so neither in silence, as silence, but in an holy dependence of the mind upon God from which dependence silence necessarily follows in the first place, until words can be brought forth, which are from God's Spirit. And God is not wanting to move in his children to bring forth words of exhortation

* The original (Dutch) edition of Sewell's "History of the Quakers," gives not only the words but the music of the hymn of praise composed and sung by Catherine Evans in the prison at Malta

or prayer, when it is needful ; so that of the many gatherings and meetings of such as are convinced of the truth, there is scarce any in whom God raiseth not up some or other to minister to his brethren , and there are few meetings that are altogether silent. For when many are met together in this one life and name, it doth most naturally and frequently excite them to pray to and praise God, and stir up one another by mutual exhortation and instructions , yet we judge it needful there be in the first place some time of silence, during which every one may be gathered inward to the word and gift of grace, from which he that ministereth may receive strength to bring forth what he ministereth , and that they that hear may have a sense to discern betwixt the precious and the vile, and not to hurry into the exercise of these things so soon as the bell rings, as other Christians do Yea, and we doubt not, but assuredly know, that the meeting may be good and refreshful, tho' from the sitting down to the rising up thereof there hath not been a word as outwardly spoken, but yet life may have been known to abound in each particular, and an inward growing up therein and thereby, yea, so as words might have been spoken acceptably and from the life . yet there being no absolute necessity laid upon any one so to do, all might have chosen rather quietly and silently to possess and enjoy the Lord in themselves, which is very sweet and comfortable to the soul that hath thus learned to be gathered out of all its own thoughts and workings, to feel the Lord to bring forth both the will and the deed, which many can declare by a blessed experience."

This passage, while it shows clearly that the purely silent meeting was exceptional among the early Quakers, indicates also, perhaps, the danger of that quietism which became characteristic of the silent meeting at a later stage in Quaker history, when the silence was treated almost as an end in itself

Going on to speak of the need for waiting upon God in silence, Barclay says "He that cometh to learn of a master, if he expect to hear his master and be instructed by him, must not continually be speaking of the matter to be taught, and never be quiet, otherwise how shall his master have time to instruct him? . . . If the soul be still thinking and working in her own will, and busily exercised in her own imaginations, though the matters as in themselves may be good concerning God, yet thereby she incapacitates herself from discerning the still, small voice of the spirit . . . This great duty then of waiting upon God, must needs be exercised in man's denying self, both inwardly and outwardly, in a still and mere dependence upon God, in abstracting from all the workings, imaginations and speculations of his own mind. . . And man being thus stated, the little seed of righteousness which God hath planted in his soul, and Christ hath purchased for him, even the measure of grace and life, which is burdened and crucified by man's natural thoughts and imaginations, receives a place to arise, and becometh a holy birth and geniture in man, and is that Divine air in and by which man's soul and spirit comes to be leavened. . . . And so man's place is to wait in this; and as hereby there are any objects presented to his mind concerning

God, or things relating to religion, his soul may be exercised in them without hurt, and to the great profit both of himself and others; because those things have their rise not from his own will, but from God's Spirit, and therefore as in the arisings and movings of this his mind is still to be exercised in thinking and meditating, so also in the more obvious acts of preaching and praying. And so it may hence appear we are not against meditation, as some have sought falsely to infer from our doctrine, but we are against the thoughts and imaginations of the natural man in his own will, from which all errors and heresies concerning the Christian religion in the whole world have proceeded. But if it please God at any time, when one or more are waiting upon him, not to present such objects as give them occasion to exercise their minds in thoughts and imaginations, but purely to keep them in this holy dependence, and as they persist therein, to cause the secret refreshment and the pure incomes of his holy life to flow in upon them, then they have good reason to be content, because by this, as we know by good and blessed experience, the soul is more strengthened, renewed and confirmed in the love of God, and armed against the power of sin, than any way else; this being a foretaste of that real and sensible enjoyment of God, which the saints in heaven daily possess, which God frequently affords to his children here for their comfort and encouragement, especially when they are assembled together to wait upon him."

In considering this passage, we must remember that Barclay in common with other Puritan thinkers of this day accepted the received Augustinian view

of fallen human nature, from which it followed that all merely human activity of the mind was tainted with wrong. The only acceptable activity must be God-given, not man's work, and therefore the outgrowth of that Divine Seed which is implanted in every man. It is important, however, to realize that Barclay's conception of silent worship does not reduce it to a merely negative attitude of mind and soul. There must, indeed, be an effort to purge the mind, not only of wandering thoughts, but of the thoughts and desires which may have filled it as the worshipper first sat down, and which may not really be the proper subject of meditation. There must be an expectant attitude of soul, expressed in the word "waiting," which is very far from mere passivity, but calls for a deep exercise of one's inmost nature. The response to this may not be expressed in terms of formulated thought, or even of thought, as we know it, at all, but in something which is realized as affecting the very roots of one's being, or it may come in that form of meditation which is truly an act of devotion, the theme dwelt on being unfolded in the sense of the Divine presence and with a constant desire for the Divine guidance.

Barclay notes with delight that silent waiting upon God is something which "the devil cannot counterfeit," though "he can accompany the priest to the altar, the preacher to the pulpit, the zealot to his prayers, yea, the doctor and professor of divinity to his study, and there he can cheerfully suffer him to labour and work among his books, yea, and help him to find out and invent subtile distinctions and quiddities, by which both his

mind, and others through him, may be kept from heeding God's light in the conscience, and waiting upon him.* . . . And therefore when the soul comes to this silence, and, as it were, is brought to nothingness, as to her own workings, then the devil is shut out, for the pure presence of God and shining of his light he cannot abide, because so long as a man is thinking and meditating as of himself, he cannot be sure but the devil is influencing him therein, but when he comes wholly to be silent, as the pure Light of God shines in upon him, then he is sure that the devil is shut out, for beyond the imaginations he cannot go, which we often find by sensible experience . . . He can well enter and work in a meeting, that is silent only as to words, either by keeping the minds in various thoughts and imaginations, or by stupefying them, so as to overwhelm them with a spirit of heaviness and slothfulness, but when we retire out of all, and are turned in, both by being diligent and watchful upon the one hand, and also silent and retired out of all our thoughts upon the other, as we abide in this sure place, we feel ourselves out of his reach."

* We may perhaps feel that Barclay is needlessly severe on the learning of the doctor of divinity, and does not make allowance enough for the Divine guidance that may be given in preparation and in study certainly this was too often overlooked by succeeding generations of Quakers. But one must recall that he wrote at a time when lengthy and elaborate sermons, nicely divided into numerous headings and sub-headings, strained the intellect and patience of preachers and congregations alike, and religion was in danger of being regarded as concerned with schemes of thought and "notions" rather than with the deepest experience of the heart and will.

Happy Barclay! Succeeding generations have known both the difficulty of wayward and wandering thoughts and the drowsiness to which it is all too easy to give way during the silence which should have been better utilized.

In yet another respect Barclay claims superiority for silent worship "The excellency of this worship doth appear, in that it can neither be stopt nor interrupted by the malice of men or devils, as all others can. . . . For how far soever people be separate or hindered from coming together, yet as every one is inwardly gathered to the measure of life in himself, there is a secret unity and fellowship enjoyed, which the devil and all his instruments can never break or hinder. . . "

"It doth as well appear as to those molestations which occur, when we are met together, what advantage this true and spiritual worship gives us beyond all others, seeing in despite of a thousand interruptions and abuses, one of which were sufficient to have stopt all other sorts of Christians, we have been able, through the nature of this worship, to keep it uninterrupted as to God, and also at the same time to show forth an example of our Christian patience towards all, even oftentimes to the reaching and convincing of our opposers. For there is no sort of worship used by others which can subsist (though they be permitted to meet) unless they be authorized and protected by the magistrate, or defend themselves by the arm of flesh. . . ."

"For how can the Papists say their mass, if there be any there to disturb and interrupt them? Do but take away the massbook, the chalice, the host, or the priest's garments, yea, do but spill the water

or the wine, or blow out the candles (a thing quickly done), and the whole business is marred, and no sacrifice can be offered. Take from the Lutherans or Episcopalians their Liturgy or Common-Prayer-Book and no service can be said. Remove from the Calvinists, Arminians, Socinians, Independents or Anabaptists, the pulpit, the bible and the hour-glass, or make but such a noise that the voice of the preacher cannot be heard, or disturb him but so before he come, or strip him of his bible or his books, and he must be dumb for they all think it an heresy to wait to speak as the Spirit of God giveth utterance, and thus easily their whole worship may be marred. But when people meet together and their worship consisteth not in such outward acts, and they depend not upon any one's speaking, but merely sit down to wait upon God, and to be gathered out of all visibles, and to feel the Lord in Spirit, none of these things can hinder them, of which we may say of a truth, we are sensible witnesses "

Isaac Pennington, a mystic whose writings have had a deep influence on many of their readers, refers repeatedly in his different works to the Quaker view of silent worship, and in the little tractate entitled: "A Brief Account Concerning Silent Meetings, the Nature, Use, Intent and Benefit of Them,"* there are several passages which may be set beside similar ones in Barclay.

"And this is the manner of their worship. They are to wait upon the Lord, to meet in the silence of the flesh, and to watch for the stirrings of his

* Works, Vol IV, p 57 seq.

life, and the breakings forth of his power among them. And in the breakings forth of that power they may pray, speak, exhort, rebuke, sing or mourn, etc., according as the Spirit teaches, requires, and gives utterance. But if the Spirit do not require to speak, and give to utter, then every one is to be still in his place (in his heavenly place, I mean), feeling his own measure, feeding thereupon, receiving therefrom (into his spirit) what the Lord giveth . . . And then also there is the life of the whole felt in every vessel that is turned to its measure, insomuch as the warmth of life in each vessel doth not only warm the particular, but they are like an heap of fresh and living coals, warming one another, insomuch as a great strength, freshness, and vigour of life flows into all. And if any be burthened, tempted, buffeted by Satan, bowed down, overborne, languishing, afflicted, distressed, etc., the estate of such is felt in spirit and secret cries or open (as the Lord pleaseth) ascend up to the Lord for them, and they many times find ease and relief, in a few words spoken, or without words, if it be the season of their help and relief with the Lord.

“ For absolutely silent meetings (wherein there is a resolution not to speak) we know not, but we wait on the Lord, either to feel Him in words, or in silence of spirit without words, as He pleaseth. And that which we aim at, and are restricted by the Spirit of the Lord as to silent meetings, is that the flesh in every one be kept silent, and that there be no building up, but in the Spirit and power of the Lord.

“ Now there are several states of people. some

feel little of the Lord's presence ; but feel temptations and thoughts, with many wanderings and roving of mind. These are not yet acquainted with the power, or at least know not its dominion, but rather feel the dominion of the evil over the good in them. And this is a sore travailing and mournful state, and meetings to such as these (many times) may seem to themselves rather for the worse than for the better. Yet even these, turning, as much as may be, from such things, and cleaving (or at least in truth of heart desiring to cleave) to that which disliketh or witnesseth against these, have acceptance with the Lord herein, and continuing to wait in this trouble and distress (keeping close to meetings, in fear and subjection to the Lord who requireth it, though with little appearing benefit), do reap an hidden benefit at present, and shall reap a more clear and manifest benefit afterwards, as the Lord wasteth and weareth out that in them, wherein the darkness hath its strength "

Even in that early day the danger of a dead and formal silence was a real one, for we find Penington writing in 1671 from Reading Goal to " Friends in Truth in Chalfont and thereabouts " an epistle in which he pleads " And I beseech you in the bowels of tender love, take heed of sluggishness, or carelessness or deadness of spirit in your meetings, these things in no wise become the Lord's people, nor your professions of waiting upon the living God, ye are to look up, to watch, wait and breathe for the Lord to be exercised by His Spirit, to have to do with Him before whom all things are naked and bare, to offer up that acceptable sacrifice of a broken heart, of love, life, humility, thanksgiving, etc., and

to receive what the Father of mercies stands ready (in and through the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of His love) to give forth unto you. Can you be thus exercised, while in a drowsy, sluggish, careless spirit? Do not such dishonour the Lord, whose name ye should honour? " *

The emphasis laid by Penington on the active character of the act of waiting upon God had been expressed at an earlier date by a small tract " Silent Meeting, a wonder to the world," published in 1660 by William Britten, who, as he tells us, was one who had "formerly passed through a two-fold ministry, first as a gifted man in the national, secondly as a Baptist, and now brought to wait on God in silence "

" I have found and felt," says Britten, " more of the Lord's presence in one silent meeting than I have done in a hundred sermons preached by me in times past, and though then I did deliver them with much zeal " He goes on to point out that worshippers " must in the power of Jesus Christ sincerely strive to have these three things in themselves I A spiritual watch, II A Spiritual touchstone, III. The Spiritual scales." The spiritual watch, or active waiting upon God, being the first condition of worship, while the second was required to try each work, word or thought which then might be presented to the mind, and the third " to weigh, ponder, or consider all things to be spoken or done " †

To those who worship in a silent meeting to-day the three requisites which William Britten names are still as needful as they were to those to whom

* Works, Vol. IV, pp 513-514

† Op. cit., pp. 9, 10.

he wrote. We can readily see the importance of the spiritual scales and of the spiritual touchstone, but the first pre-requisite is the spiritual watch.

We are dealing with a region of deep spiritual experience, where the metaphors we use are obviously but imperfect symbols, and yet may be more helpful than the language of abstract thought, which is itself but a more shadowy form of metaphor. *

The nature of this watchfulness of the spirit is well explained at a later date by the Quaker philanthropist, John Bellers, in a little pamphlet, published in 1703, "Watch unto Prayer"

"Watching is as needful to the soul as breathing to the body. As breathing, whilst living, is inseparable from the body, so watching is inseparable from the soul, whilst it lives towards God. . . .

"Watchfulness is the great preparation of the soul, in order to bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. . . . This is to have conversation in heaven. A sincere man (upon his watch), though his body stands upon the earth, yet his soul reaches unto heaven, where are the spirits of just men and angels, and where God is, the Judge of all."

* It may be asked whether the use of the scales and the touchstone imply an ethical value judgment. This is not necessarily always consciously present in such a spiritual process, yet it is probably there in the background, wherever the worshipper tries to test thoughts and resolves by the light of the Spirit of God, as manifested not only in his own conscience but in that of the prophets and saints, and above all through the personality of Jesus Christ.

Watchfulness is first, he adds, a duty, and then becomes a delight. If the mind "is not first prepared by a due watchfulness out of meetings, and by it reduced to the temper of good ground, but that the mind by unwatchfulness is left as the stony, thorny or highway ground, that man will be much indisposed for the worship of God, when he comes into a meeting . . . A bare turning the thoughts of the mind inward, when one comes into meeting (without it be prepared by watchfulness), is not the true spiritual worship, for as out of the heart comes the issues of life, so doth the issues of death also, such as lust, adultery, anger, murder, etc . . . But he that watches in the Light (to bring his thoughts into captivity to the obedience of Christ), it will lead him to the New Jerusalem (from whence it shines), where the Lord God and the Lamb are not only the Light thereof, but also the Temple to worship in but nothing that defiles can enter there, and yet the gate stands always open to such as walk in the light, but to none that walk in darkness (or evil thoughts), because there is no night there" ("Watch unto Prayer," 1703).

In a later work he writes —

"The silence of a religious and spiritual worship is not a drowsy, unthinking state of mind, but a sequestering or withdrawing of it from all visible objects and vain imaginations, unto a fervent praying to or praising the invisible omnipresent God in His Light and Love; His Light gives wisdom and knowledge, and His Love gives power and strength, to run the ways of His commandments with delight. But except all excesses of the body

and passions of the mind are avoided (through watchfulness) the soul doth not attain true silence" ("An Epistle to the Quarterly Meeting of London and Middlesex," 1718, p. 14)

It is impossible to turn from a perusal of the writings of the seventeenth-century Quakers, in which frequent reference is made to their worship, without feeling that they are aglow with a great experience. Their style may be formless and full of redundancies, their argument may sometimes halt, but this experience dominates their whole thought. It has given life a new meaning to them. They are conscious of the reality of the Divine Presence in their lives, convinced that for every man there is a like possibility if the Divine Seed, bruised and buried though it be, be allowed to grow and take its true place. Their attempts to explain in the language of thought this experience, and this faith of theirs, were necessarily imperfect and coloured by the conceptions of their age. They accepted a large part of the orthodox religious thought of their time. Man's fallen nature, in their view, had no hope in itself other than this God-given Light or Seed, the *vehiculum Dei*, as Barclay calls it, present in all men, though oppressed by wrongdoing and prevented from growing and dominating man's life as it should. Can we put into modern language the conception of worship for which Barclay pleads? The meeting for worship is an opportunity for united fellowship in seeking union of will with the Divine Presence, and the illumination of thought by the Divine Light. Silence is not worship, but the opportunity for true worship. This worship involves not only outward but inward

stillness, the laying down of selfish desires and thoughts, the concentration of the will and of the whole nature of the worshippers upon the Divine Presence, no negative or passive attitude of spirit, but rather one of tense activity. It does not exclude meditation, but the meditation must be under the sense of the Presence of God. There must, however, be times of silence not only from words, but also from thoughts, if we are to hear the Divine voice within us.* This worship is no mere individual act: one worshipper helps the others, both consciously and unconsciously. Spoken words of prayer or praise or exhortation may come to one and another, and if they are "in the life," they will be helpful to all. However wise the words, or however well intentioned, if they have just been spoken in the worshipper's own will, they will fail to find the response in the listeners which a few simple words, spoken "in the life," will receive. Premeditated utterances, as the early Quakers taught, do not necessarily exclude the operation of Divine grace, but tend to do so. In Barclay's view premeditated sermons and a fixed liturgy were sometimes made use of by the Divine goodness, but this did not justify, as he held, their retention, when a more perfect and spiritual way had been revealed.

In the course of the eighteenth century the character of Quaker meetings for worship underwent a gradual change. The number of meetings held entirely in silence increased, and there were

* "Love silence, even in the mind," writes William Penn.
"True silence is the rest of the mind, and is to the spirit what sleep is to the body, nourishment and refreshment"
("Advice to his children," in Works, Vol. I, p. 899)

fewer powerful travelling preachers. The dread of reliance upon the faculties of the natural man became more strongly marked. Ministry was looked upon with awe as a solemn Heaven-sent gift, descending from above and operating through the humble submission of the will of the minister to be the instrument of the Divine message. A peculiar intonation of the voice became very general amongst Quaker ministers when preaching or praying

The printed Journals of ministers of this period show with what dread they received their first calls to speak in the ministry, how awful the duty was felt to be, and how often it was only after long and deep spiritual struggles that they were willing to appear in the ministry

In faithfully endeavouring to follow their inward Guide these Quaker ministers had often to go through bitter and difficult experiences, as when a travelling minister at an appointed public meeting, and sometimes even at a series of such meetings, remained the whole time in silence, feeling that he had no message given him for those who had come, beyond the inward travail of soul through which he passed. At the other extreme is the curious fact that thankfulness was sometimes felt for the very length at which a minister was enabled to speak. There was no provision in such a conception of ministry for teaching, involving systematic thought and study, though in some cases a richly stored and thoughtful mind unconsciously was used to good effect. We may find an instance of this in the sermons of Samuel Fothergill of Warrington, who was one of the most noted of Quaker preachers, some of whose discourses were taken down in shorthand and published,

and were widely read long after his death. It is easy for us to-day to see the weakness of a purely prophetic ministry and the accompanying lack of teaching. On the other hand, there were many cases of remarkable spiritual vision, in which the minister was enabled to "speak to the condition" both of groups of people and of individuals with decisive results. Perhaps the finest flower of eighteenth-century Quaker worship may be found in the life of John Woolman, whose sensitive spirit entered into such marvellous sympathy with those with whom his lot was cast, and who lived in such faithful communion with his Master that he was able in a remarkable degree to put himself alongside the needs of those whom he addressed and to bring them the message which would raise their lives to a new level.* But as a consequence of the accepted view of the nature of the ministry as something quite apart from the conscious co-operation in thought of the minister, many thoughtful and deeply religious members never opened their mouths in a meeting for worship or conceived of their own experience of thought and mind as in any way connected with a possible preparation for ministerial service, the very idea of human preparation for such work being contrary to their conception

* One of the last of Woolman's writings was his little essay on silent worship, in which he characteristically notes that the great expense often arising in connection with other forms of worship involved a burden of labour upon many poor people which Christian simplicity would avoid. He realized the strangeness of silent worship to many who attended a Quaker meeting and longed that Friends might "live answerable to the nature of an inward fellowship with God, that no stumbling-block, through us, may be laid in their way."

of worship.* This view of worship and ministry was no doubt strengthened by the widespread reading of the teaching of continental Quietist writers, such as Madame Guyon and Molinos, in particular through a little volume, largely extracted from their writings and from those of Fénelon, entitled, "A Guide to True Peace," which went through a number of editions in the early nineteenth century. At this time there were Friends who considered the silent meeting as the ideal one, and such a West of England Friend declared in the Yearly Meeting that he was thankful to say that in his meeting there had been no vocal ministry for many years. One can imagine what courage and strength of conviction would be needed before any member of such a meeting ventured to engage in ministry. Too often drowsiness fell upon those who should have been worshipping, and it became necessary to watch against this as a besetting sin, and a query dealing with this danger was yearly considered and answered by all meetings.

Meanwhile there had already begun within the Society, though later than in other English denominations, the evangelical revival which culminated in the second half of the nineteenth century. With it came an increased study of the Scriptures and a strong revulsion from the Quietist attitude of mind. The movement was vigorously opposed for

* This is illustrated in the "Spiritual Diary" (1776) of Dr. John Ratty of Dublin. In the numerous references to meetings for worship the writer shows hardly a trace of any thought of his being given a message of ministry to others, though he wrote on religious subjects and spoke helpfully on the occasion of religious visits to private families, and was deeply concerned for the religious life of his Society.

long, and the new methods were condemned as "creaturely activities," but gradually the movement gained ground and became increasingly dominant, though the earlier school of thought never disappeared, and the two streams mingle in present-day Quaker life.

One result of the evangelical revival was a change in the character of much of the ministry, some of which became expository in character. Wide fields of Christian literature were studied by men who valued their fellowship with other denominations, and felt more in common with them than with Quaker mystics of a non-evangelical type. There was a revulsion from what seemed, and sometimes was, a morbid introspection, instead of the worshipper being advised to "turn in" or "centre down" in order to realize true worship, he was urged to an effort of faith, to an exercise of thought and will to apprehend the gospel revelation of Christ. The wide extension of philanthropic and political activities which accompanied the evangelical movement also enlarged the horizon of worshippers and ministers alike. The needs of suffering humanity and the duties of citizenship became more frequently a theme of thought, of prayer and exhortation. Private religious study, in particular the study of the Scriptures, played, consciously or unconsciously, an increasingly important part in preparing the mind of the worshipper for the times of worship. Some of the leading evangelical ministers of this period were also mystics, with a deep personal experience of mystical worship; others, while accepting unquestioningly the methods and experiences of an earlier Quakerism, regarded them

as little more than minor accidental differences of comparatively small importance beside the great fundamental truths of historic Christianity ; for them the silence of their meeting was warmed by the glow of faith in a personal Saviour, by the love they had seen revealed in the Cross they could be happy in meditation over this, or over some portion of scripture, or in seeking to find what the mind of the Master might be for some problem of conduct ; but they could not have used the language of the mystics to describe their experience of silent prayer, and were glad to join in instituting meetings of a different type, with music, singing and pre-arranged addresses, which were felt to meet the needs of those not used to the Quaker silence. These " Mission Meetings," as they were usually called, were held in the evening, the morning meetings continuing upon the old basis of silence

Of recent years there has been a tendency for such meetings to be replaced by " Fellowship Meetings," in which short periods of devotional silence have a regular place, along with music, hymns and pre-arranged addresses. In other places the ordinary evening worship on a basis of silence is combined with the reading and exposition of some scripture passage or devotional writing, or with a pre-arranged address of a teaching character. One who has been brought up in the Quaker fold does not come to the silence of worship as to something isolated and apart from the rest of his life. He has been accustomed to the brief period of silent worship accompanying the reading of the Scriptures in the family circle, usually beside the morning breakfast-table ; every family meal is

preceded, not by a formal spoken grace, but by a moment or two of silence, as the opportunity for prayer spoken or unspoken, at the opening and at the close of all business meetings for Church affairs, and at almost all committees of the Society he is accustomed to a few minutes of silence, and sometimes to longer periods of similar worship, and when stages of difficulty are reached in the course of the business discussion it is equally natural, at the suggestion of the presiding clerk or of some individual, or occasionally by a common instinctive act, to seek in silent prayer for a way of unity and concord, or for some new light upon a difficulty that seems insurmountable. Apart from these collective acts, there remains also the preparation of the background of individual prayer and silent meditation, which gives its strength to the ministry of daily life, just as the background of collective silent prayer does to the ministry of worship.

In one respect a definite change has taken place. The seventeenth-century Quaker writers emphasized the importance of silence as a stillness of the mind from all lower and self-prompted intellectual activities, though far from excluding a higher form of meditation. In the eighteenth century the Quietest attitude became more pronounced and the mind of the worshipper was conceived of as a pool, in which every ruffle of premeditated thought should be stilled. In the silence some thought might appear, and might find expression in vocal ministry, but it was regarded as something quite apart from the will of the worshipper, a heavenly pebble dropped from above into the silent well of worship and sending its ripples across the stillness, in which the

human part was one of passive submission and acceptance only. This conception was closely bound up, as has been already shown, with the Augustinian view of fallen human nature, tending to a distrust of man's intellect and will and all their activities. Truth, though waiting to reveal itself to every soul, was thought of as coming from above, as the act of Divine grace and love, altogether apart from the will of the worshipper. The evangelical revival brought with it almost unconsciously a great intellectual renaissance through the study of scripture which it advocated and provoked, the revival at the same time encouraged an active attitude of spirit in its emphasis on the importance of the act of faith, and these two changes were reflected in Quaker worship. The whole conception of ministry was widened, to the great benefit of the worshipper, whose spiritual life had been narrowed by the absence of a teaching ministry in touch with all the concrete problems of life and thought. But the gain was not unmixed, both for minister and fellow-worshippers. Too often the old awe and reverence which surrounded the service of ministry tended not merely to diminish but sometimes to disappear. Personal experience might degenerate into anecdote, exposition of scripture might be so elaborated that the spark of fire from the altar which prompted it was lost in the smoke of the speaker's lucubrations; the call for a change of heart and a great personal decision might itself become mechanical or disappear in an emotional appeal which did not reach deep enough, because it did not spring from the deepest in the speaker's own spirit.

In the Society of Friends to-day we are coming to realize that the mystical and the evangelical school represent partial expressions of an ideal of life and worship, and that both are needed to complete each other in order that our silent worship may be both wide and deep, and that the ministry springing from it may appeal to the whole life of the worshipper and all the needs of his nature, it must not be cut off from the experience of life, the thought of the needs and difficulties of the world, from the treasures preserved in the life-stories and the thoughts of saints and poets, of thinkers and doers, above all from meditation upon the words and work and the personality of the Christ of history. But it must also be something much more than this. In every true act of silent worship there is an act of communion, even though that communion is not always fully conscious, as the deepest within us reaches up after the Source of truth and life and love. All ministry springing from such silence, whether in prayer or praise, in the unfolding of teaching or the giving forth of a prophetic message or an evangelical appeal, if it be what it should be, will be given as in the sense of the Divine Presence, realized as coming in touch not only with the heart of the speaker but with the spirit of all his fellow-worshippers. The more fully and continuously that Presence is so realized, the more truly will the ministry fulfil its object and appeal to the deepest needs of the hearers. No amount of previous preparation, nor even of previous prayer, can supply the place of the act of worshipping communion, by which the meeting and the speaker are prepared for spoken words, and by which, while he speaks, the

speaker is helped to realize that he is in the presence of the Master of assemblies, and only a fellow-servant and fellow-worshipper with those about him.

This ideal of worship is very imperfectly realized, but it is realized, to some extent at least, whenever men meet in common discipleship with spirits turned together towards the guiding Presence of their unseen Lord Broken and marred by wandering thoughts and desires it often is, and by words that lack the touch of true life, but even a few moments of true communion may make a long meeting worth while nay, the very effort of spirit, the striving after light and fellowship, though uncrowned by the joy of conscious communion, may be of the utmost value and may form the needful preparation for a later happier experience

In this conception of silent worship there is room both for meditation and for previous preparation of thought on the part of the worshippers, provided always that the preparation of thought is subordinated to the sense of the Divine Presence in the act of united worship and to a willingness not merely to speak but to refrain from speaking, if at the time what was previously realized as a helpful message is not felt to be a message for that meeting or for that occasion Sometimes others may speak and a line of thought or an appeal be set forth with which the message which has come with one to the meeting does not seem to harmonize. In that case it will need a stronger sense of call and urgency in the message, if it is to be delivered, and it may need to be almost entirely recast or else withheld for another occasion. Sometimes, again, a message so withheld may return once more with

fresh sense of urgency on some other occasion. There is room, moreover, in such worship for ministry of a teaching character, which involves the preparation of previous thought and study, provided that the speaker is in spiritual sympathy with his fellow-worshippers and does not disregard the need for the right atmosphere of previous worship, or the right relationship of what he is going to say with what others have spoken or may contribute to the meeting. To-day it is easier to realize than at some earlier periods that we are no longer concerned solely with the inward spiritual life of the individual worshippers, but with their relationship to human life as a whole, and we feel that it is right that social, industrial and international problems should be considered in the atmosphere of worship and in the light of that central Presence. This, again, involves thought both in the meeting and outside it, but it must be thought brought into relationship with the guiding Presence, and humbly submitted as material which may be made, as it were, a sacrament, if the Master so wills it.

In actual experience we must admit that the ideal relationship of ministry to silent worship is all too imperfectly realized. There is liberty for all to take part, and sometimes the liberty is abused; there is always a danger that a minister who has felt a true sense of call may yet "run out into words," or that a message may be spoilt by over-elaboration or the needless intrusion of other thoughts. Yet at its best the ministry which springs truly in the midst of the fellowship of silent worship may, in spite of such defect of form and grammar, or even of thought itself, reach its goal more surely than a carefully

pre-arranged message delivered in faultless literary form. The humble, broken words, the imperfect thoughts, spoken in the consciousness of fellowship with fellow-worshippers and in the sense of dependence upon the unseen Master's Presence, have their own interpreter with them, and may help to birth in the heart of the hearer a response of thought and will and a deeper response of the spirit which no eloquence or argument could have brought forth.

The position is similar, and perhaps clearer, in the case of vocal prayer, that peculiarly priestly act of ministry. Extempore prayer can seldom indeed equal, and often falls pitifully short of, the beauty and dignity, the width of scope and nobility of thought of many of the great prayers of the ancient liturgies, and yet, granting that often the imperfections and frailties of the individual mar and distort the offering of extempore prayer, such prayer in its very nature has a quality of immediacy and reality which no fixed forms of language, however august, can give, if it springs from the depths of a spirit exercised in true worship. Extempore prayer may indeed, if it merely represents the unpremeditated thought and aspiration of the speaker, unlinked to his fellow-worshippers and without any sense of a deeper inward prompting, have not only all the disadvantages of the most formal liturgical prayer, but added drawbacks of its own, reflecting but too well the speaker's personal limitations. Yet such prayer is not the outcome of the worship of the spirit, and it is the peculiar advantage of silent worship that by it a unique opportunity is given to the development of prayer which represents not merely the aspiration of one

individual, still less a hortatory discourse, couched in the form of supplication, but the expression of the needs and longing of one who by a priestly act of the spirit puts himself alongside of his fellow-worshippers, enters in some measure into their spiritual condition, and, feeling their need as his own, prays not only for but with them, as one of them, and, borne along by the spirit of prayer, raises with them the hands of a trusting child towards the unseen Father, in whose Presence all together stand. In such an act of prayer it may be possible to use ancient words, to mingle with words and thoughts struck from the moment's needs the immemorial phrases which have through ages been the means of man's petition, or simply to use the homely words that come most naturally to many men, whether lettered or unlearned. But there must be no striving after literary form, or thought for it; for if the mind is intent on that, the spirit loses touch of the one essential thing. He who prays thus must remember that he uses words for men, not for the Spirit, who sees beneath the words and thoughts to our deepest needs. The words he uses must be the simplest and most natural clothing of his thought, his thoughts themselves no elaborate effort of the mind, but the humble and unadorned garments of his spirit, as it goes out to be the spokesman and representative of his fellow-worshippers and enters with them in communion with other seekers after truth, with suffering and sinning humanity, with the unseen cloud of heavenly spirits, and reaches out after that healing, guiding, and redeeming Presence before whom all are gathered together.

In a meeting held upon the basis of silence, if that silence be no mere form but a living one, words of spoken prayer will usually spring up naturally. Sometimes they will form part of the prelude of worship and aspiration, giving perhaps a lead to subsequent meditation and ministry. At times they will follow (and often from other lips) some searching or uplifting message of exhortation, or, again, they may form the outward crown of the whole period of united worship, gathering up simply and feelingly the aspiration and inspiration that have arisen through different spoken messages earlier in the meeting, but reverently and briefly, as in the sight of the Master whose touch alone can make our paltry crumbs to fill the baskets with which we go laden homeward. Yet at times the deepest unity of prayer and its most perfect expression, after some meeting in which we have been brought together into great exercise of spirit or to some new vision of hope or of duty, is found not in words, however beautiful or well chosen, but in the deep hush of outward and inward alike, when we bow together in thankfulness of heart, experiencing the reality of a communion which our thought cannot fathom and our words are powerless to express.

Is it possible for a present-day Quaker to understand the development of silent worship which has gone on during the past three centuries, and to realize the place which it still is destined to hold? In the seventeenth century silent worship was felt to be the means of liberation of the deepest spiritual activities. Those who met in this way for the first time had undergone a profound and awakening

experience: their whole life was stirred by the realization of the Divine Presence within them and within every man, and their worship was coloured by the thoughts and feelings which were the outcome of this experience. In the eighteenth century, though at intervals individual men and women shared in a large degree the experience of the earlier Quakers, the silent meeting became rather a discipline of the spirit. Introspection was developed sometimes to a morbid degree: waiting in worship was too often regarded as a passive condition on the part of the worshipper, and a profound distrust of mere human or "creaturely" activity led to the neglect of intellectual activity and the cultivation of a purely prophetic or devotional ministry. The earlier strong sense of fellowship in worship tended to sink into the background.

The evangelical revival brought a renewal of intellectual activity, a revulsion from negative quietism and from introspection, and accompanying it came a wider outlook on human need and social and civic duty, as an outcome of renewed contact with the thought of the Scriptures and the historic personality of Jesus Christ. Yet it often lacked something which the earlier mystics, for all the narrowness of their outlook, possessed, which gave a distinctive quality to their worship and their lives.

We are not now in danger of that atrophy of the intellectual faculties which beset the later eighteenth-century Quakerism. We realize to-day that mind and spirit alike have their place in the act of worship. Silence is not an end but a means to an end, the united communion of the group of

worshippers with the Divine Spirit. An act of thought, an act of will, may each one be made a sacrament, if touched by the realization of the Divine Presence.

In the sea of silence into which we are entering, spoken words or formed thoughts may be like a raft to which we may cling and move forward; we may swim from raft to raft, from thought to thought, we may climb up upon our raft and get a vision of the sky above and of a little of the course that lies ahead of us; but if we are to become strong swimmers, we must not stay upon one raft or be afraid to trust ourselves to the waters

Dr Thomas Hodgkin has compared the ministry that rises from a meeting for worship to the fruitful islands on the surface of a lake. We may pursue the image further. The islands seem isolated, but beneath the depths of the waters they are united together. This simile may often be verified in the experience of a meeting where the worshippers have been brought into a unifying silence and different speakers have touched upon kindred themes or divers aspects of a common theme, in such a way that at the close all that has been said has been felt to have had a place as parts in one harmony. The times of silence were as essential a part of this whole as the spoken words. It is not merely that without them it would not have been possible to have taken in all that was said. The intervals of quiet prayer and meditation served to help one to appropriate the message already spoken, but also gave rise to the thoughts in which the later messages took form.

Sometimes, it is true, spoken contributions will

mar the unity of a meeting and break the sense of worship. In this case there will be need for redoubled spiritual effort on the part of the worshippers that the meeting may not suffer injury. Silent prayer may avail to guide and help the hearers and even to modify or restrain the speaker's part. At the worst we must follow George Herbert's counsel "God takes the text and preacheth patience"

It may be sometimes that the liberty of a silent meeting is taken advantage of in a different way, by some contentious person, possibly a stranger, who does not realize the nature and object of such worship. Even here, however, there may be found a remedy in silent prayer, through which our minds may be carried above the opposing thoughts into a serener region, where we may perchance find presented to us an answer (which we could not have attained by controversy) to difficulties that have been raised. Happily such misuse of the liberty of utterance is comparatively rare. On the other hand, experience shows the peculiar value of a period of united worship in bringing one who may have a message of ministry to deliver into touch with those who need it. Many cases might be cited in which the ministry which has followed a period of deep silent worship has been peculiarly fitted to the spiritual needs and condition either of certain individuals or groups, or of the meeting as a whole. This may in certain cases, perhaps, be connected with a special psychic temper, but there can be little doubt that without the medium of silent prayer it would find very imperfect expression.

One cause of weakness in the silent worship of present-day Quakerism is the absence of adequate mental and spiritual preparation on the part of many who come to the meetings for worship. Some, indeed, grow up from childhood insensibly to appreciate their meaning and others who have joined them for the first time as adults also have felt at once that they provided the atmosphere their spirits needed. But such a case as Caroline Stephen's may be held to be exceptional.

"On one never-to-be-forgotten Sunday morning I found myself one of a small company of silent worshippers, who were content to sit down together without words, that each one might feel after and draw near to the Divine Presence, unhindered at least, if not helped, by any human utterance. Utterance, I knew, was free, should the words be given, and before the meeting was over, a sentence or two were uttered in great simplicity by an old and apparently untaught man, rising in his place amongst the rest of us. I did not pay much attention to the words he spake, and I have no recollection of their purport. My whole soul was filled with the unutterable peace of the undisturbed opportunity for communion with God—with the sense that I had at last found a place where I might, without the faintest suspicion of insincerity, join with others in simply seeking His Presence. To sit down in silence could at least pledge me to nothing; it might open to me (as it did that morning) the very gate of heaven" *

In the case of many a worshipper it might be held that it would be as unreasonable to teach a

* "Quaker Strongholds," pp. 3, 4.

child to swim by throwing him into a deep pool of water as to plunge him unprepared into the silence of a Quaker meeting. Some children have been taught to swim in this way; others would almost certainly be drowned. It has been experience of the need for some intermediate stage which has led in many cases to the establishment of special children's meetings, in which the children are given food for thought and the opportunity to join in hymns, often sharing also for a part of the time in the worship of the main meeting. For the purpose of training in silent worship, the practice of directed silent prayer, which has been followed in some other churches, may be of great value, provided it is a step to a further stage of greater freedom, but it cannot be regarded as adequate, if those who join in it are never to get further. The prayer of petition, and even the prayer of intercession, cannot take the place of the prayer of communion.

Is it possible to suggest from Quaker experience that silent prayer might be made use of more widely in other denominations with a definite gain to the worshippers?

In silent prayer there is a unique opportunity for human fellowship through a medium which transcends all intellectual differences, in which all social distinctions disappear, in which the barriers of language vanish, and all can meet in sincerity and truth. Especially in times of deep emotional and spiritual experience do we feel the inadequacy of human words and even thoughts, but in silence deep answers to deep.

Silence has a unique value as a preparation and

background for ministry and vocal prayer, more especially for extempore prayer. If sermons and prayers could be preceded and followed by even a short period of devotional silence, would they not mean much more to all? Not only the worshippers but the minister himself would surely be helped through such an atmosphere of worship.

The silence of common meditation is a valuable discipline of training, especially in our hurried and crowded modern life, in which too many find it hard to get the opportunities for quiet in which to think and pray. If this silent meditation is difficult in a mixed congregation, it may yet be worth while to arrange special opportunities for it, which worshippers could be encouraged to attend. The habit of seeking at intervals a period of silent prayer may help to give to all life a background of peace, which will prove of peculiar value in moments of stress and special difficulty.

Most valuable of all is surely the silence of communion, when the outward stillness is but a shadow of that deeper inward hush of the spirit, as the souls of the worshippers bow together in the Presence of their unseen God and realize that the Divine Love and Goodness are there in their midst, are there to be imparted—that they are being made partakers of a great sacrament. At the great moment of some ancient pagan mystery, as the supreme act of worship approached, silence was enjoined on the worshipper. The call *favete linguis* was no mere empty priestly formula, but represents the natural shrinking of man's spirit from profaning the Holiest with inadequate human words. The solemn hush that falls upon the congregation at

the supreme moment of the Catholic Mass is a deep expression of this wonderful silence of communion, and it is surely no accident that in the realization of the Divine Presence a reverent silence covers the worshippers. At such a moment, may we not understand a little of the meaning of Habakkuk's cry "The Lord is in His holy temple let all the earth keep silence before Him?"

This silence in which a group of worshippers bow in spirit in the sense of the Divine Presence may lead to that deepest experience of communion, which transcends our thought and can still less be imaged forth in words. When the human spirit is permitted to have this highest fellowship of communion, in which joy and sorrow have new and fuller meaning, it is fitting that both alike should be transfused with a solemn awe. The soul realizes its frailty, its littleness, its utter unworthiness, as it turns towards the Divine Light and Goodness, and as, in response to the Divine Grace, the door of the heart is opened to the heavenly Guest, it has no words for its adoration, for a joy and sorrow that cannot be uttered.



AN AFTERWORD

MINISTRY IN THE QUAKER MEETING OF TO-DAY

FOR more than two hundred and fifty years the Society of Friends, almost alone among Christian communities, has endeavoured to maintain the ideal and the practice of a free ministry. Other Churches have found a place for the lay ministry in some, like the various Methodist Churches, an important place. For the greater part of nine generations it has been an essential expression of the very life of Quakerism. Yet it must be admitted that the proper carrying out of the ideal of a free ministry is still a problem imperfectly solved by the Quaker community, however truly it may have been solved by particular groups or by individual members

To outsiders the Society of Friends appears to be a society of lay persons, without clergy or hierarchy of any kind. To those who strive to realize its ideal from within its membership, the Society is a fellowship where there is no layman, all of whose members are clergy. The aim of the Society is not to abolish priesthood, but to make all members of

the Christian community conscious of their priestly powers and duties. Yet this aim is very imperfectly realized. Among the first two generations of Friends were many leaders who had been trained in other schools, some of them as Anglican or Puritan clergymen. Barclay had been educated at the Catholic Scottish College in Paris, Penn at Oxford, and under a learned French Huguenot teacher. They rightly maintained that a college education was in itself no qualification for the ministry, that the call might and did come to men and women of no book learning, in the midst of the common work of the world. But they did not despise the education they had received. George Fox himself tried to learn Hebrew in later years and urged the importance of setting up schools for the children of Friends. Yet, as the years went by, the Quaker ideal of ministry became narrowed, the importance of waiting for the call of God became in practice misapplied, as though it merely involved a passive state of mind, from which even thought itself was to be shut out. The responsibility of ministry was felt to be so great, that it was shunned as too heavy a burden, the advice of Paul to the members of an early Christian community to "covet earnestly the best gifts" was not heard, save by a few. The Quaker community as a whole left its application to the individual and made no collective effort to help its members to make full use of this greatest gift of prophecy. Friends generally came to accept the dictum of the old Puritan controversialist "God hath no need of human learning," and forgot the apt reply of the learned Dr. Thomas Fuller: "Still less hath He need of

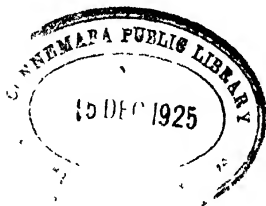
human ignorance" In particular, the ministry of teaching, as contrasted with purely devotional and prophetic ministry, was neglected Even now it has not found an adequate place in the normal life of the Society as a whole Not that gain would come by the intrusion into worship of elaborate didactic discourses which lacked a sense of fitness to the needs of the members, and had no "call" behind them But religious teaching is needed by all if all are to attain the fullest life and the widest service A meeting which has no teaching ministry lacks something which needs to be supplied As some may receive a Divine call to speak a message which has not been thought out beforehand, so others (or even the same person) may be called to prepare themselves to teach, to study, and think out, with the best help they can get, problems of life which they and their fellow-members need to face. Ministry of this kind has been insufficiently encouraged. The gift of prophetic ministry is not something utterly unnatural and apart from our thought Poets, prophets, and reformers, when they bring men a message from God, have listened with their whole soul and with all their mind to His voice, and that voice speaks through the whole depth of their personality. It is a partial and inadequate caricature of the truth which represents inspiration as accompanied by a paralysis or suspension of the intelligence. With our whole being we are to serve God and man With our mind's best effort we must try to respond to the Divine call. Preparation and thought will not by themselves suffice; but the fact that a man does feel a call to give a message should not excuse him from

thinking, but rather in itself lay upon him the duty of more earnest thought

Until recently such teaching ministry as the Society of Friends enjoyed was due, on the human side, to the faithful service of individual Friends; the only indirect provision made for it was that for training teachers for Quaker Schools, to some of whom the call to ministry came and with a richer background of thought and reading than that possessed by the majority of members. To make a wider teaching ministry possible there must be a higher standard of general education. The position of a free ministry will be strengthened by more adequate provision for wider and deeper religious study than exists at present. Friends ought to be able to make their contribution to the common stock of Christian philosophy and Biblical studies through fuller provision for teaching and research, and, while only a limited number may as yet be able to find time for advanced and specialized study, yet such study should be made possible for all and in some measure held forth as a duty to all. Travelling lecturers, in connection with Quaker colleges or working under meetings or Committees of the Society, should be able to hold courses of lectures, not only at large centres, but in smaller meetings too, thus helping to prepare the background of thought from which a thoughtful and helpful ministry of teaching would be fed.

Not without effort can the Society of Friends maintain the priceless heritage of freedom. Each member must listen still in silence for the as yet unspoken message, for the prompting of the Divine voice. But the boundaries of this freedom must

be widened by listening throughout the week for a message that may come in book or thought or spoken word, as well as in the silence. Some men are willing, with Whittier, to open all the windows of their hearts to the day, while they keep the shutters of their minds half closed at best. If the Society of Friends is to realize its ideal of a community of priests in the service of humanity, the dedication of certain times to prayer is not enough. The best thoughts, the highest and deepest thinking of which all are capable must be brought to the service of God and man in a ministry which must be as wide as life itself.



REFERENCE

